Poetry Quarterly

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Editorial

The old controversy over realism in poetry has become again for some people an issue. Poets who still use the timeless imagery no war will ever supercede are, it seems, being accused of living in an ivory tower, or being mediaeval minded, phrases which do not mean very much and are little more than terms of abuse thrown out by people who for some reason have lost their tempers. We re-state once more our unchanging editorial policy, which is quite simply to print the best poems coming our way. There is no laboratory test, however. Poems are not measured in terms of ohms, millimetres or therms. There must be a personal element in editorship which gives its character to a magazine. We like work which shows a knowledge of what is being written today although this is no guarantee that it is good. We serve a public which has read widely the work of poets *both* past and contemporary. Need we again reassure our readers that we disapprove of labels? Whether he writes about King Arthur or Zola's sponge that looked like a brain in a bucket of blood which Mr. Comfort so much enjoys reminding us of, makes little difference to the success or failure of a poet's work. Scientists have never been able to define life for us, nor have critics yet succeeded in telling us exactly what poetry is.

J. B. Sidgwick

December 31st

The dim threshold of the years astride,
Janus at the gate.
Posing heroically as he who mans
The bridge of Tellus
Steering the great ship to haven,
Perihelion
Of the year's orbital sweep.

Solitary at the gate
The lone vanguard of the advancing tide;
Lone too at the rear,
Securing the receding throng
Against the upboilings of a violent past.
So he would have it,
Janus at the gate.

You poor doublefaced
Sneakthief of the quietly falling minutes,
Fixed you are at the icy terminus.
The bitter winds of two years
Tug at your ankles.
December's icebound calm is at your face
And at your face
The tooth-edged gales of the young year,
Ravening from the north-east
With ice blades in their grasp.

Anne Ridler

Taliessin Reborn

"The ship and the song drove on."
Taliessin through Logres.

I

At that time, some were disturbed by the music
Moving from the horizon,
But they were chiefly men who lived on the coast,
Who hearing could also see:
Saw that the moving music irritated the waters,
Saw waves flung and foam following,
While that country sea-coming
After the waves and the sound sailed slowly upon them:
Whose shores were birth, whose towers were order,
whose woods in leafmeal the material of man.
Then in the bright and blinding mist of its approaching
It disappeared from sight.
Some were relieved and almost, though never quite,
forgot;
But some were obliged to know that the being of
this country
Through the passage of ear and eye had pierced into
the heart,
And from that seat
Interpreted experience, taught them how
The time they breathed, earth they devoured, their
rituals and their money,
The map too of seas and states, had here their form
and relation,
But for the most part it came unheard,
Unseen, and was unsought.

II.

But yet that country had long been visible
On clear days, to those that were capable,
From towers in the town, from hills and the sea-shore.
Some thought it a mirage and looked no more
(Still the one-dimensional eye of a baby);
And some thought it—although admittedly
A fact in the landscape—not the soul's concern;
And there were some who could discern
The rock behind the mirage, through the spray
And rainbow of fancy the precise line; and few
Lastly the very few had seen
Cast on the level sand as if on a screen
Their own vast shadows: shapes of the true self
In the moment of heaven or the narrow eye of love—
The depth and height of an unguessed perfection—
But each split with a shaft of contradiction.

There was the real map of England: by
The deep valleys of potentiality
Rose the peaks of her fulfilled power;
The sprawling skerries of half-submerged desire
Confused the coasts, and the islands of plain longing.
A country of conscious being,
Of contemplated life. And some tried
To express in words the essence of what they descried.
They did not point the meaning—so indeed
The myth was to each according to his need:
This and his powers determined what he heard.
But after centuries the grooves grew blurred:
Myths of Arthur, the Grail, the Wounded King,
Were jumble for poets, play for children, a spring
Of endless ink for scholars, and still lacked full
meaning.

III.

So it was time that we saw it again,
And remembered that our footsteps echo in another world
(Even concrete cannot imprison that reverberation).
But now for our generation that world is understood,
Named and commanded in its pathos and significance;
The symbols that would burn the naked hand
Conveyed to blood and heart by the insulation of verse.

This poetry of which I write, in its coarse, flexible mesh
Rich with a strange juxtaposition of colours
(Here and there snarled or gaudy, but still strong-fibred),
Woven of only living words, knotted with metaphysic.
This is the mesh that drew the loud myth so close
(The manuals coupled, the echo instantaneous)
This at last compelled the slow sea-coming
And loosed upon England the invisible virtues.

And now? Shall we know ourselves for what we might be,
Cease to fight, to rape the earth, to fear, cease even to die?
If any art could change us, or the strangeness of a myth,
We should have altered long ago. We remain as we were.
But like the Invisible Knight Garlon who punished unseen,
A terror, an outrage, yet finally a friend;
Like our seemingly wasteful and unforgivable pain,
And the insult of death—it is a holy ghost
That works among the fallen; nothing in the end is lost.

John Hall

Ballad for Three Travellers

What did we go to see? A reed shaken
In the cup of the valley? For wind had come
Over the mountain and water spoken.
Early we left our home,

Early before the dogs stirred, knowing, hearing,
Hearing the pulse that all night like a drum
Had beaten the silence, knowing, fearing,
Now that the wind had come.

Early we left; the dogs and birds still sleeping
Did not detect us. The jagged air
Caught at our breath. No words. A hare leaping
Suddenly saw us there.

We were the eyes, the ears, the tongue of nature;
Leaves had forfeited all sense to us,
The otter surrendered, the lonely creature
Gone to his wilderness.

We were as three trees withstanding weather,
Embalmed in the cathedral of the wood.
The wind of history blew up; together
We met it, together stood.

"O I came out to hear the acorn drop
Down from the tree to become a tree.
A child in the night is without hope
And near its destiny."

"O I came out to see the river run
From nowhere to nowhere, yet in this place
Perfected with beauty and the light of the sun
And spacious in this space."

"And I came out to hear the pee-wit cry
Whose passion and politics make mock of you
For there is no answer to such oratory
And nothing more to do."

Was it for this, then, the self-same token,
We came to the valley? The wind has come
Over the mountain and water spoken,
And we are far from home.

Charles Davey

To the Holy Souls

Now the earth is walked by the uncoffined dead
and the living lift the lid of the tomb
wanderer in a candled catacomb

Three
days in darkness: first of forgetting but
the third begetting: yet—O how loud howling
then—
in a full day and a night between
Repentance, remembering, as the whole
past blossomed in a dream garden

Third day he put the flame on candles with
a finger touch
whose skin shone whitely and his hair shed
pallid light.
Kicked coffins and they fell as sunlit
dust. Along this silver coloured tunnel
the white saint treads, a cylinder of fire
before, behind, below, and higher than
earth's blue heaven, black catacomb become
divine infinity of light.

"Prophecy 1942" in the last number, was by Charles Davey and not by James Kirkup. We hope this will serve as a warning to those who still send in MSS without name and address on each page.—Editor's Note.

Brenda Chamberlain

Elegy

Sweet limbs,
Burst the sealed earth,
Rise from your narrow bed;
For until I should come from the West
You would wait for me, you promised;
You did promise while you were bright,
Before you were dust wrapped in linen—
You promised to wait for me
Till the North saw my face.

I laughed even in the fishing-grounds
When waves hungered over me,
For you had till that time spoken truth—
But now I am grown hungry as the wave,
Grown hollow, become
A bell to toll your praise.

Come, raised by my power of life,
From the sodden clay
Woman of the foxglove cheek,
For you did promise while you were bright
Before you were dust wrapped in linen—
You promised to wait for me
Till the North saw my face again.
But now I am grown hollow;
Am but a bell to ring your passing.

Nicholas Moore

The Distances of Sea
(for Priscilla)

Eyes given us to see, and lips to share
The golden dawns that come like fireflies in
Our hopeless night of grief, O be beyond
All mountains and all rivers fine in telling
That day we strode upon the Scottish alps
High above heronry, and merciless bridges:
From there we saw the distances of sea.
From these, from rock and scarp, from view of wind
Birth will bring finery to make your child,
To make him strong as dawn upon the hills,
Nestled amid the fern of you, his grot.
O love, all rivers and all mountains look
Brokenly upon our grieving towards the sea
Where ships, like swans, ride silently. Bridges
Have been built here to cross the white of falling
Waters, to break the faces sheer of cliffs,
Cold, merciless, to span mountain from mountain
Against the older distances of lochs.
Here from these may your baby grow sweet edges
To point his character and make him fit
Amid such distances, such scenery,
To face all griefs and make the whole world happy.

John Heath-Stubbs

Two Men in Armour

Stark by the Eastern gate
Stand the two iron men
Full-throated singing

As when before-dawn darkness
Lolls on the Earth, the impossible season
Of flesh subsided or nerves drawn tighter,
The fire-hackled, blood-wattled, needle-spurred
cock
Stretches his wings through the blackness, proclaims.

The iron hand is on your shoulder
The iron hand is on your head

When pickpocket water strips the flesh
Green-fingered, lurching the drowned limbs,
choking
The pale throat, drums on the bursting eyes;
And rolls and rolls where monstrous things go by,
All selfhood murdered, twitched beneath that tide—

The iron hand is in your hand,
—When fire filches the proud heart from you,
fagotting
Your bones for kindling—Oh my Prince
Let music go up then, let praise go up
Like shepherd's fluting on the lonely hills.

Till Love construe the cryptic iron faces.

E. O. Sigler

To my Brother

Never forget: O, never now forget:
when pale by day, dark, dangerous at night
rise to your cloud their threat and awful fear:
never forget each counteracting star
teaching your thumb, teaching your flattered heart;
life weighs that much, streams, valleys cost a lot,
breaking to pieces of a microphone
hits hard the listeners' eardrums, yet the pain
will not disturb where shouts had delighted,
nor horror dismantle the arrogant threat.
Exuding the hermit's inhuman wisdom:
O brother, helping to sack our prison,
Remember always the book and the names,
remember the sick and the tarnished tombs.

(*Nov.* 1941).

Sean Jennett

Sonnet

I who walk this world of reeling blood
feel through my veins the vulture fire of time
fall sodden ash; and know the calcined bone
my prison house, this brain-case furnace dome;
nor lay this finger inches from the real
my body folds. For crack the stubborn rock
strong sinew shall, and gain no ultimate,
nor iron forge: they double at the rack

still, these tormenting, torturing desires.
Can this be all, they ask, this rag of flesh
built, bound on bone? this circumscribing skull?
I care. Yet from this planet of foul sores
my senses seeking what, found in the flush
of guns. is real, lack the daedalian skill.

Robert Greacen

The Alien World

O I was tense and loving then
When the whole wild grief of autumn swept
And put again her likeness on the rack of memories.
I was taut with fear that summer evening,
Numb as a plate of glass, dead as a cigarette stub,
As fingering the last letter, I stepped into a vacant
future,
Knowing no other life or impulse or desire,
Clutching no other future than the sunlight on her
hair.
Then, for a long dull moment, time ran cold
While rain swished on the indifferent city,
And the ghost of war sidled through empty streets.
So now, fearing as then for each new future,
I hear the traffic lurch, the windows shiver,
The hurt dogs whine, the brakes pull short . . . .
And now, as then, the fast world tense with reeling
Spins to a stop and leaves me undefended
Against the septic agony of wondering how-and-
when . . . .
Sitting and flicking the parchments idly,
I hear the whole wild grief of autumn weeping,
Weeping for lost summers beyond the lost horizons,
Weeping with the torture of this alien world.

Kenneth Gee

November Evening

The fog creeps like a cancer,
Scrapes a wet glove along the cornice
And pours down the funnel of air
Under the dim blue wartime lamp
In coils like autumn wood-smoke
Burning an afternoon away.

Our world contracts, lies still,
And in this dead sea-calm
I hear the water's slow drip now
Falling in opaque globes from boughs
Of trees that grow suddenly to giants
In the padded light.

The bell from the town hall gongs
Over the streets in a damped down shudder:
Time is at half-mast now.

The stream in the park is lapping
On the crumbling mud and stones.

The deer have long since fled,
From far old woods
Where glades are empty now.
So many trees were felled in an earlier
war
The forest is only a sad shell
Of what it was; today its floor
Lies open to the crueller weather.

The walls of fog shut out with their calm
Blindness all acts of war,
And violent death's not thought of here
Though raiders were over the town
Only seven nights ago.

So many trees were felled,—
We walked down ragged colonnades
Where rain drove all at once in icy
arrows.

I remember this now
While I wait in the silent ring of grey,
Between the lost moment and tomorrow's
That hovers like an eagle over rocks,
Beauty and terror in each wing.

Water lapped against a wall,
There were chestnuts in the gardens,
And fountains played
Like the blooms of a hundred springs.

Peter Ure

Blindness

The weakness and the damage which we see
Reflects in his eye full of angles,
And in it the rose-coloured clouds break
Till the storm of dust overwhelms the silent
landscape.

The gaps of buildings shoot towers like teeth,
And in the jagged pool the steady policemen
shake,
Guarding the place of disaster and entry,
The crime committed last week.

In his eye too are the circles which mount
And slowly form a cirrus of broken arcs,
Becoming huger and more violent until they
Build a solid cap over the internal day.

The disease which has struck his eye
Is without cure. But after a time
The hollow socket presents a bald cancer
Which is without pictures and does not answer.

Margaret Stanley-Wrench

The Medal

Now on the edge of happiness, look on,
It slopes to sorrow as the sunlit hill
Descends in shadow, till the eye, looking back,
Is dazzled at the light from which it came.

The double face, the coin of good or ill
Is spun and falls, the bitter tolerance,
Knowledge that haunts and spoils the argument,
That makes the quarrel flat and impotent,

Oh ! bitter world, where evil hangs to good,
The world of sun and birds and the freckled
spring,
Twigs knotted with buds, and the laughing eyes
of men,
And war and hate and the crack of boot on flesh,

Till life, like a medal pinned on the left breast
With glittering surface, teases eye and ear,
But with its obverse, stained, sallow as brass,
Like bitter acid burns away the heart.

Ross Nichols

Landscape

Constatic pressure of manypointed dazzle
vertically upward from stonebroken stream in
sunlight
stabs the belief into the heart: the roar
of fuming waterfalls urgent into blood
gives to excess the unspent urge, and the bird
the sweeping parabola of certainty
and life's new cry.

Longings and aims through generations growing
the great-boled beeches aspirant sway
in time-wind; little individual hopes
mere season's growth of cabbage. Horny oaks
with horizontal realism hang
against mere visionary sky. Leap low
the frogs in the subconscious undergrowth.

The quilted valley supine with fielded crops
is annual and seasonal quietude
of charitable certainty.
The tortured static stone
can but strike free
a scattering brave brilliance of faith,
white passage on night's cave of predestiny.

N. K. Cruickshank

As though the Eye were Death

As though the eye were Death—
Were death by drowning, were that hole in time
Through which life runs to which the leucocyte years
Of breath and vigour pour, thronging the narrow
Flood-lit corridor of memory—

As though the eye were death, my love puts round you
Before you come yourself as mirror sequence:
Your face in many moods, words, gestures filled with
Your goodness and your grace
Back to the very salt-fresh verge of childhood.

In case you drown, are for a moment lost:
Lest the calm eye, instant as sudden death,
Sees for one breath an ordinary face:
Bonny, but where the flood the sword of beauty
Sweeping away my rest.

Ian Serraillier

The swing in the woods

Above the sleepy river yawns the deep-sea wood
lullay lulla to the wind afloat lullay.
Nothing shocks the mermaid streams till
with starling shudder of wings the morning
children, clinging to root, dodging bramble,
up the steep slope slip laugh and scramble.
Who's first for the swing? Fling out a hand,
grab anything. I'll race you—
I've won!

Straight, tiptoe, I loose and in long line pendulous
whine through the wood-hollow—ah
chill to cheek the air—and whine again.
And again. Look down when I dare
to leaf carpet leopard-spotty
where sheep are specks and cows all dotty.
Dizzy? Head up! Out to the squirrel ways,
shout there! The brown nimble scamp (missed him
by two toes) bough-long leaf-under
he scampers—lost him, where?
"Off, Sally, you've had more than your share!"
Down I jump. Your turn, Christopher,
John next, Jennifer, Sue,
and last go a long one, Jonah, for you.

Weeks after, alone, I came again. Idle
the swing lolled under the ugly tree. Dud,
the woods mutton-dead. A mean wind blew,
about as romantic as a coughing cow.
I didn't swing.
Oh I wish I'd stayed away.

James H. Kirkup

Above Derwentwater

The hills lift up their heads
and demonstrate on tilted slopes the black
maps of entire clouds.

Some are slain upon
the false horizon. Others
remove contours, enlarge
the square forests, or emerge
upon the bristling lake, to darken
and dissolve and drown.

Slow as the train furrowing
between grey walls, and deliberate,
unhesitating in their choice, they span
the valleys and the bridges, or burst
raining, on the noiseless fells.
A wind decides them, takes its stand,
moulds them and reveals
new attitudes.

Alone, dark altitudes, they will remain
not clouds or mountains, but vast
shadows darkening the anxious memory.

B. Rajan

Indian Road

The road runs straight as the striking of a snake
And on either side the sibilant dusts lifts hostile
Teasing the paddy hairs with its gaudy, sloughed,
attrition.
Yearning, the scalp looks on the sunless sun.
The mud cracks signify its death to order
As in mens' minds the neat rectangular fields.

The lone lost raven beats its wintry life
We are alone with flame and sky, and flaming
shadow.
Tensed to vibrate to some resultant foci
There is nothing but the roads' decree. Nothing
to measure
Us, but the measure of the sinuous road.

Coiled in its crux we too shall flex. We are
As there are thumbs of God on cobra hoods.
The accumulated edict of our will
Is pressed by timeless points of intersection;
And the radiant road is a paraphrasing light
Convoying sanction to the scalded earth.

J. Maurice Lindsay

Poem for Youth, October 1942

Now, when the purple clusterings of evening
are streaked across the sky, and the sad, thin light
like a child's whistle the October sun
has fallen with dead leaves under the night,

I remember the past that has slunk away in sorrow,
its agonies settled with nothing further to lose;
that for every step in the future another will
suffer
and none to redeem, and none can refuse, can
refuse!

And I, still watching the waiting fields of England,
am filled with a fevered sweep of love in my veins
for you, my companions, O my soldier brothers,
whom the slow incommunicable change

of sacrifice and suffering leaves dumb,
patient as animals or proud as seas'
indomitable fury, but as vainly
passioned and with no release!

Here in these shafts of evening, where the fields
propound uneven theorems to the skies
I reflect that history is secured defeat,
experience but hollow-headed lies.

Always our suffering is incomplete,
our fear of the future the betrayed despair,
always the struggle through the present moment
a little further, and always nothing there!

Always the love that cannot save another,
the hate not bound by bomb and shell alone;
and the denial of the broken brother
who cried for water and received a stone.

So have two seasons vanished in our hands;
yesterday Spring; our steep surging lives
today are Winter, in their urgent prime
with Death the reaper at our unripening sheaves!

P. G. Whitfield

Poem: Cloud Patterns

Frail feathers drifting in a quiet sky
Above the khaki and the camouflage
And the sun like brass on the trees and across
the far hills,
Slate and lilac they float in the sunset
Stretching vermilion at the edge of the earth.
Oh, the delicate cirrus is a kiss,
Or a word,
But the bright sword is in the sky, crimson,
And dark clouds hang in the jaws of death

Each in its way, clouds move and melt;
In sacrifice of battle
Good dies to evil;
Day gives to dark the russet cottages,
The fluted fields.

Only in the heart is a terrible freedom,
And no wisdom.
Show me the delicate light Vision.
Tell me the evening is a dream
Mirrored in the eyes of the Son of Man.

Malcolm Neville

Winter - words

Over the valleys of ghosts and green stone
The pale pendant of the dry-breasted moon
Crepitates the thread of leaf and dry glass;
In centre cavern around the fish
The figures fertilise the ancient word,
And cross and arrow with the sacred bird
Trace the snowman to the paradisial pass

First fast thrust of nebulae are fused
By swift passage of this scarlet phaeton,
A Roman opulence of fulgent views
For pilgrims eye, and triple-coronated sight,
A new, white-winged alchemy of light
Will etch the future's fluorescent phantom.

The liquid striata of a cyclic wisdom
Ciliated on the sea-green wheel pass,
Calling from the caustic prism
Virgin tints of cavern-crystalled winter,
Lighting lustre for the last leaf-shadowed mass
For repose of soul of a shrouded summer.

W. S. Graham

My Glass Word Tells of Itself

Writing this so quietly writes of itself.
So serving only cities falling in words
Round the dead guessed at fifty
In the petrol passover and the dribbling ink
Down hills of quick rubble,
I watch through a medal the drowning Noah
sink.

Flood's animal calls each lifesize hill
A shoal, and the panorama of news
Floats man on cork.
Poor like a scribble my crime on a diamond
Is a gannet I am made in,
Not by your head but the beak of my diving
hand.

Writing this so quietly writes of itself.
So saving only the seaport in a bottle
With a history of threads
On a told ship under the sky's green grave
On the sea's coloured oval,
I pour round glass the sand my rivers have.

Iain Fletcher

Love Poem

And I believe in your body as a velvet quickness,
Your body as a springing Psalm,
Mare under the thighs:
Limpid hands inexorably produced
Like the pure movement of an ineffable portrait,
Stranger, terrible avenue and tangle of glory,
Perpetual journey in and through yourself,
To yourself, in and further than body.
And I believe in the softness and curving
And logic of clouds: the mildness and duplicity
Of swans far away on water.
And I believe in you as the tension
Between approaching swords:
The tremor and tension of birdwings in the
leafage,
All things wild, and escaping, over there.

Richard Grindal

Elvira

Incurring a hopeless promise
from the ring-weaved bowl
which the Byzantine Church
timelessly emptied. Of all
futility incurring.

Grooved in the open page
and flowing.
Red leaves which urgently resist
the savage wound.

The potency of autumn, self-restrained,
threatens all spent, Cathedral
women, who with their lavender smiles
forget, nor hear the rain
pounding the oyster boat.

And white November flowers of sex
drawn to the focal point, stripped
of all transparency.
then from the lips rejected.

A blue fluid shining behind
the glass glazes the hardwood.

Richard Trudgett

My darling you have seen my hidden symbol
Not the peering face or the ruined
Rustle in the leaves but
The lament that climbed the wooden hill
Yet my sad poison hangs
On the open door, the chains
Round the old man's neck
And stairs built for two to lie on.
And though I travel with the buried leaf
Avoid the dead by the roadway and drink
Sometimes too steadily
My eye is turned unending, yes
My darling, all unending
To our bled dream and broken summit.

Denton Welch

Jane Allen

Our maid, Jane Allen,
Fly-by-night,
Left the dishes
Shining white—
Took her stockings
From the horse,
Darned the heels
With stitches coarse—
Drank a cup
Of Indian tea:—
Then dropped a letter
In a tree;—
And this is what
The letter said
"When you get this,
I'll be dead."

REVIEWS

Le Crève Coeur—Poèmes, Louis Aragon
(Horizon & La France Libre 6/-)

The war has so far not revealed many poets of international significance. It is probable that this book of Aragon's verse will prove to be the most important literary event of the decade both for France and for Europe. Criticism of its technical significance is at this stage premature—all that one can safely say is that it contains some of the finest French lyric since Hugo, into which is incorporated the enormous technical resource which has developed within the language since Rimbaud. At the same time, this is the first occasion in the present generation in which a poet has found himself able to speak on behalf of a public, and not to it or at it. Like all work of a genius—and this book is, I think, unquestionably one of genius, which its author is unlikely ever to surpass—it has been produced by a chance falling together of circumstance. The poet had undergone the preparation which was essential to the work and which could have occurred in no other way—he had the great technical resource of surrealism to draw upon—he underwent an experience upon a national scale, he was provided suddenly with leisure to re-create that experience in national terms: lastly he found his public reintegrated by defeat, so that the experience which he had conceived as an individual in a state which had become atomized, he could utter on behalf of everyone. One can hardly wonder at the fortunate circumstance: there is no way in which such a conjunction can be produced artificially. A work produced under such circumstances could not fail to be a masterpiece, provided that its author had Aragon's integrity and sincerity of vision. The book ran like wildfire in France until it was withdrawn. The poems

have been repeated by word of mouth, from man to man. There is no greater measure of poetic success. In the genesis of these poems one can see the reason for the lack of similar success in English war poetry. Nobody is to blame, but the time is not ripe.

The technical perfection of this work shows more clearly than ever how excellent a training in poetic craftsmanship Surrealism may be. Upon a framework of traditional *chanson* form Aragon has superimposed a musical pattern of remarkable intricacy, a blend of rigid and modified end-rhyme with complex internal assonance. The surreal significance of real imagery has been stressed throughout—in a landscape of wreckage and headlong flight realism and imagery touch hands. Modern war impresses not by its cataclysmic aspect, but by its childish and unreal simplicity.

"Le paysage enfant de la terreur moderne
a des poissons volants sirènes poissons-scies
Qu'écrit-il blanc sur bleu celui-ci
Hydre-oiseau qui fait songer à l'hydre de Lerne .?

To say that Aragon has accomplished for the 1940 campaign what Hugo accomplished for Waterloo, or Zola for 1870, is the nearest one can come to true comparison. Zola achieved his effect in a novel of 400 pages—Aragon has achieved the same comprehensiveness and the same effect of solidarity in a poem of under 100 lines. "Complainte pour l'Orgue de la Nouvelle Barbarie." The monotony of the barrel-organ tune which constitutes the form of the poem is terrifying. Aragon shares with Zola the power of realising the dramatic in terms of the single inanimate object—the blood from the hospital falling on the white china asters, the sponge like a brain floating in a bucket.

"Des fuyards jurent à mi-voix Une fusée
Promène dans la nuit sa muette chanson . ."
"Le pitovable accoutrement des faux campeurs . ."

" Ainsi parlaient des artilleurs
Semblables à des ombres peintes
Les yeux ici, la tête ailleurs
Semblables à des ombres peintes
Un passant qui soudain les vit
Sauvagement rit de leurs plaintes
Un passant qui soudain les vit
Il était noir comme les mines
Il était noir comme la vie
Il était noir comme les mines
Ce géant qui rentrait chez lui
A Méricourt ou Sallamines
Ce géant qui rentrait chez lui
Leur cria Nous tant pis on rentre
Si c'est les obus ou la pluie
Leur cria Nous tant pis on rentre
Mieux vaut cent fois chez soi crever
D'une ou deux balles dans le ventre . . ."

Of such a poem one can make no estimate except to say that its technical achievement is staggering and that in itself it constitutes Aragon as one of the greatest living poets. In the light of the three or four war poems which attain this level, it is hard to judge fairly the love poems, the more decorative and satyrical pieces in which the element of tradition—"les lilas et les roses"—or of Aragon's apprenticeship is most permanent. In a brief review of this character it is possible only to attempt to indicate the superlative quality of the work. But an England separated from the stream of continental output, and isolated in the company of allies who are all, unfortunately, devoid of an accessible and contemporary creative culture—in China by reason of the language, in Russia by reason of the limitations of applied art, in America by reason of its absence—owes a great deal to the enterprise of Mr. Watson and Mr. Connolly in placing this book at the disposal of writers. Its probable influence is incalculable.

ALEX COMFORT

Little Gidding, by T. S. Eliot (Faber and Faber). 1s.

This is the last part of the long poem that began with *Burnt Norton* eight or more years ago, and was continued in *East Coker* and *The Dry Salvages*.

Little Gidding presents us with as many problems as did the earlier parts, problems of language and of subject. As before, the title-page itself presents the first of the problems. Mr. Eliot did deign to explain to us islanders what the Dry Salvages are, but he leaves us to puzzle out for ourselves the significance of the English place names he has attached to the other three parts. Little Gidding is in fact a hamlet in Huntingdonshire, and it was here that Nicholas Ferrar founded the monastic community familiar to readers of *John Inglesant*. The community enjoyed the favour of Charles I, but was dissolved by the Puritans in 1647.

Little Gidding appears to be written in simpler language than the first three parts, though it is in the same sonata form, yet, continuing what was written before, it in some measure recapitulates, and an understanding of the first three is necessary for the comprehension of the fourth part.

Little Gidding commences with a recall of the fused season image that was noticeable in *East Coker*, though that is not the first time Eliot has used it, and continues with a very beautiful description of an icy countryside in the sunlight. This mid-winter spring is not only on the land, however; it is also in the soul.

For long T. S. Eliot has been damned or praised as a high churchman and his poetry interpreted in the light of high church doctrines, but never, it seems to me, with complete success. I think he has moved beyond doctrine and is seeking to formulate a personal faith based not only on the teachings of Christ, but on those of Buddha and Krishna also. We know from

The Waste Land that he is a student of Brahminism and Buddhism.

If you came this way,
Taking the route you would be likely to take
From the place you would be likely to come from, . . .
It would be the same at the end of the journey, . . .
And what you thought you came for
Is only a shell, a husk of meaning
From which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled
If at all. Either you had no purpose
Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured
And is altered in fulfilment.

This way leads to the church, or chapel of Little Gidding, and I can only draw from these lines that what is received in worship is something other than the ordinary person aims for or understands. Prayer is in fact a communion with a world other than that of the body and mind, yet indivisible from the body and mind, the world the dead inherit.

We hear again the refrain of *East Coker*, with its insistence that time, if it is a progress at all, is a vortex:

Near the ending of interminable night
At the recurrent end of the unending

It is again "In my beginning is my end," "In my end is my beginning," and this concept is important in *Little Gidding* also. At the still centre of the whirl of time the poet meets with an apparition, with which in the weird crepusculé of dawn he converses. Who is this apparition? Eliot describes him as a dead master, but the voice is Eliot's voice; the apparition might be the ghost of himself, his Doppelgänger. It recalls the long, tormenting struggle with words which we first noticed in Sweeney's complaint, "I gotta use words when I talk to you," and which is described in the fifth movement of *East Coker*.

and it points out that time has now removed certain obstructions to expression. Yet the apparition promises a ghastly series of rewards for age and experience: the worst and last of which is "the rending pain of re-enactment of all that you have done, and been." Speech is not yet the perfect instrument the poet desires.

In the third movement there is that odd dip into archaic language that occurred in *East Coker*.

> Sin is Behovely, but
> All shall be well, and
> All manner of thing shall be well,

and this is repeated at the end of the poem. It is, I find, taken from Juliana of Norwich, yet it strikes a note that too often goes unnoticed in Eliot's work. He is labelled a poet of melancholy renunciation, whereas his renunciations are not necessarily melancholy at all.

The fifth movement again repeats the vortex conception of time and life:

> What we call the beginning is often the end
> And to make an end is to make a beginning

and

> We die with the dying:
> See, they depart, and we go with them.
> We are born with the dead:
> See, they return, and bring us with them.

Over and over again recurs this image of the beginning that is an end, of the end that is a beginning. In our life death is implicit, but so too is life, and the accent of the poem falls upon the continuance of the vital spirit. Is not this a kind of metempsychosis, refined and purified, reached with pain and labour from the clogged and confused doctrines of religion? The soul is of the fabric of the universal spirit, a

fragment of the great soul, which must, at length, fuse to a final union:

> And all shall be well and
> All manner of thing shall be well
> When the tongues of flame are infolded
> Into the crowned knot of fire
> And the fire and the rose are one.

For, however man may conceive the ultimate, all gods are one god, and it is the lenses of our perception that vary and are imperfect.

This does not solve the problem of the purpose of life, a problem that has plagued not only Mr. Eliot. It is irresolvable, and must be accepted passively. It can only be stated.

The subject is one with which our language, and indeed any language, is ill adapted to deal; for language is of the world, and words that are adapted to abstract use are words that bear a double burden, are ambiguous. Our speech is not the perfect instrument of metaphysical expression, and hence the tormented, sometimes despairing, struggle with words, with the refractory elements of undeveloped language, the at first sight meaningless paradoxes, for the the poet has no choice; he cannot invent a language, beginning is not the end, the end is not the beginning. for if he did his audience would be limited to himself. He must use the language available, and it must be a living language, so that by using it to express by connotation or symbol, what was, or remains, inexpressible in the ordinary way, he may help to develop it to that point at which it will be able to transmit his ideas; by which time, as Eliot says, we shall have discovered new fields of the unknown, for the expression of which a further development will be required:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

The poetry in which these ideas are expressed may at first appear to be irregular, but it has in fact a very definite, strict, and closely controlled form. The rhythm is often biblical, though the language is not, and it moves forward slowly, thoughtfully, with the majesty of a great river. There are rapids, where there is what might be called a scherzo at the beginning of the second movement in each part. Sometimes the lines may look like prose chopped up, as some unwary critics have remarked of the other parts, but they do not sound like prose; the varied but related rhythms are apparent as soon as the poem is read aloud, as it should be, not once but many times. For this is a poem that is inexhaustible in its depths and its delight. T. S. Eliot is already acknowledged, for what such newspaper acclaim is worth, as the greatest of living poets; this new poem brings him, if he was not there before, to the level of some of the greatest in the language.

SEAN JENNETT.

Alex Comfort: A Wreath for the Living.
J. F. Hendry: The Bombed Happiness.
Emanuel Litvinoff: The Untried Soldier.
Morwenna Donnelly: Beauty for Ashes.
(*Routledge*: 2/6 *each*).

Modern poetry tends to be individual, without being particularly original. This is because the young poets, since 1930, have built up their own convention, which is already in the process of hardening and must therefore, very soon, disintegrate. The first three of these poets write within this convention, while the fourth, Miss Donnelly, is writing in an older one, that

of the early Yeats and Russell, that of the 'Nineties, tempered by a moderate dose of Georgianism. But in all of them the most recent convention is perceptible: the rhythms are loose and personal; there is a constant tight-rope walking between the older versification and vers-libre; the range of reference is fairly wide, sometimes alarmingly so, and there is not a noticeably coherent relationship from image to image. To the unsympathetic, the modern poem must resemble a Cook's tour or a walk round Woolworth's on a rainy day, until the effort is made to penetrate the implications of the scattered imagery. For the younger generation is still, alas, in the philosophic state of W. B. Yeats at the time when he considered the world as "a bundle of fragments."

J. F. Hendry and Alex Comfort in particular seem to be striving towards a new discipline and restraint, both technically and in the search for a more positive outlook on life. Hendry gives the impression of a fierce vitality; he is the most fluent of these poets, and in spite of a show of formalism his eagerness is always on the point of overflowing the bounds of the poems. This is best observed in "Picasso for Guernica," the excellent "Two Sonnets on Conscience," the "Churchillian Ode," and "The Bombed Happiness." He is a poet of moods, and passes from rhetoric to sullen taciturnity at times. But a balance between these extremes is found in "Leda," "Orpheus," "Sonnet in War-time." Hendry is an intelligent poet who knows what he is doing, and who will not long remain penned within the convention of which I have spoken.

Comfort is quieter, not very successful in fanciful poems, nor in "occasional" poems. His imagery is dense, but impressionist. In "France," an ambitious poem, he fails because there is only a "circular view" as the French say, the ciné-effect is good, but the

poem is a series of views rather than a whole. The "Elegy for a Girl Dead in an Air Raid" deserves to be remembered as an eminent war-poem, and indeed it overshadows the rest of the volume. Comfort has an evasive mind; he is in constant rumination and his poems tend to be "paysages interieurs," though none the less interesting for that. His greatest danger is stylisation, pastiche. But the "Elegy" mentioned above shows what he can do when the evasive mind is brought to concentration, and when his fundamentally religious feeling about life is brought to a testing point. Alex Comfort is a poet worth watching.

Litvinoff's poems in "Poems from the Forces" were like a douche of cold water: analytic, incisive, ruthlessly forcing towards a decision on life, death, war, love. Seeing more of his poems, in this book, the challenge is still there, but as yet he has not gone beyond the challenge. Sometimes his imagery, which at first one accepts without question, at a closer view proves wrong or incomplete:

(1) Glibly the current loosens from its hold,
The *fluid* sweeps the brittle summer on
Into the red torrent of my blood.

(2) Feet speaking the ritual of dance, dance on,
My heart is *bleached* of pain.

The word "fluid" seems to me false, while it is hard to accept the image suggested by "*brittle* summer." It is natural to accept the idea of pain "bleaching" the heart, as it does the face, but I cannot feel the truth of the image as used here. Litvinoff is not yet sure of himself, but at times his bleak statement touches home.

It might be said that Litvinoff says his poems, Comfort makes his, while those of Hendry seem organic, self-created. Morwenna Donelly an interesting newcomer, has a deal of ersatz material mixed with some of promising quality. Her long poem is

ambitious, and sustained by a sense of pattern and rhetoric. She is naive, using the same tricks over and over again, but there is every possibility that, if she can learn some of the restraint and compression of Anne Ridler and K. J. Raine, both of whom are setting a fine example to the younger generation, her abilities as a poet will be seen to better advantage. As it is, she is too much in the grip of a literary conception of the "Poetic." The anti-aesthetic of the later Yeats, or of Picasso, or the early Auden and Day-Lewis, might never have existed for Miss Donnelly. There is more poetry in the symbolism of her characters, than in her poem. There is extravagance, needless repetition and straining of adjectives, which spoil in the execution an experiment of interest and originality.

FRANCIS SCARFE.

Cage Without Grievance, by W. S. Graham (The Parton Press 5/-).

Cage Without Grievance will be, I'm afraid, a most disturbing book to many people—that is, if they don't ignore it. Mr. Archer has done it again, and with a vengeance, and here out of his hat has produced a second Dylan Thomas, but this time Scotch, not Welsh. The difficulty many people will have in believing this will be amusing to watch—but the gift of the gab is here alright, and Thomas or no Thomas, is to be celebrated. But what about the war? And isn't it mere imitation? And what does it mean? The answer to all these people is a lemon, but personally I like lemons, and I would have been pleased to have written this book myself—if I could have—especially "O gentle queen of the afternoon" and most of the other poems. I daresay nobody will believe this, but it doesn't matter. A beginning like this is capable of growing to celebrity, even George Barker's beginning did that, and there is no reason why this shouldn't too. I'd buy it, if I were you.

NICHOLAS MOORE

The Geeta, the gospel of the Lord Shree Krishna, put into English by Shree Purohit Swami. (*Faber and Faber*, 7/6).

The Bhagavad Gita is an episode in the Hindu Mahabharata, the longest epic in world literature. It is even possible that the Geeta (as the Swami prefers to spell it) is a later interpolation by a nameless worshipper of Krishna. Whatever its origin was, the Geeta is an integral part of the Mahabharata and must be considered in that background and setting.

The battle between the Pandavas and Kurus was about to begin when Arjuna, the hero of the former, noticing relatives arrayed on both sides, refused to fight even "to enjoy the pleasures of a kingdom." The Lord Krishna, Arjuna's divine charioteer, consoled him and gave a series of sermons to convince him of his duty to fight. The Lord said: "My beloved friend! Why yield, just on the eve of battle, to this weakness which does no credit to those who call themselves Aryans, and only brings them infamy and bars against them the gates of heaven?"

Arjuna argued: "My Lord! How can I, when the battle rages, send an arrow through Bheeshma and Drona, who should receive my reverence?"

Arjuna, the conqueror of all enemies, then told the Lord that he would not fight.

Lord Krishna said: "Why grieve for those to whom no grief is due? The wise grieve neither for the dead nor for the living. There was never a time when I was not, nor thou, nor these princes were not; there will never be a time when we shall cease to be."

At this point Krishna discoursed on the indestructibility of the spirit and followed it up with the theory of re-incarnation. "As a man discards his thread-bare clothes and puts on new, so the spirit throws off its worn-out bodies and takes fresh ones."

The Lord brushed aside his disciple's anxiety for the fighters. "Be not anxious about these armies.

The Spirit of Man is imperishable." You can't kill the soul. Action is more important and therefore fare forward. And so Mr. T. S. Eliot in his *Dry Salvages*:

"Not farewell,
But fare forward, voyager."

In the same chapter one is surprised to find topical slogans such as, "Refuse to fight in this righteous cause, and thou wilt be a traitor;" although *some* of the Lord's reasons, such as caste-duty and so on, for participation in the war are gradually losing their significance in the new India.

There are as many interpretations of the Geeta as there are editions. This Hindu Bible seems to have attracted people with different views and ideologies. The admirers of the Geeta include theosophists and mystics, anarchists and apocalyptics. The Marxist too can find inspiration in *some* of the passages. The Lord is tolerant enough, in spite of his admonition of Arjuna, to admit that there is another path besides the one of action. "In this world, as I have said, there is a twofold path, O Sinless One! There is the path of Wisdom for those who meditate, and the path of Action for those who work."

Shree Purohit Swami has been wise in giving only the text without preface, introduction or notes, as these have often confused the reader in the past. He has only one comment to make, that the original of his translation was revealed five thousand and thirty six years ago! The translation is good and is free from superfluous adjectives.

"Whensoever there is misery and ignorance, I come," said Krishna, and one is tempted to ask if the Swami's publishers have not selected a most opportune moment to bring out this new edition.

ALAGU SUBRAMANIAM.

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